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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION CONTRIBUTES TO DECLINE  
IN ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

1. Summary: Protests, some violent, continue in communities where dissatisfaction with the mayoral election results is ongoing, but violence overall is much decreased from the 1999 elections. Allegations of 29 "political" murders during the electoral campaign were disputed by international observers who placed the figure at two to five. Even in these, the motives were local and personal, though triggered by politics. Widespread fears of violence, bred by campaign incidents, did not materialize. Ballot boxes were burned in a few rural towns by crowds unhappy that they were denied the right to vote after standing in line for many hours. The presence of large numbers of international observers, especially in communities where violence was widely anticipated, contributed to a relatively peaceful election (by Guatemalan standards). End Summary.

Heat and Poor Logistics Produce Isolated Violence on Election Day  
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2. While protests against the election results continue in some rural communities, the 20 cases reported so far in the 2003 elections is significantly down from the 38 cases reported in 1999. Furthermore, in 1999 the violence extended to relatively urban areas (like Chinautla and Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa), and in 2003 it has been limited solely to remote villages. Most of the disturbances took place along Guatemala's steamy south coast, in areas where temperatures soared as thousands stood in excruciatingly long lines. Ballots in 3 communities (El Quetzal, Cuyotenango and San Sebastian) were burned when voters learned, after waiting in line for up to seven hours, that they were not registered to vote. Many voters who discovered they had been inadvertently excluded from the registry were able to correct the error at the local Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) office and get back in line, but in some communities frustrations boiled over. In El Estor, Izabal, voters broke into the TSE office, and in Chisec, Alta Verapaz, voters broke down doors and windows to get into a voting center. In Chajul, Quiche, a voting center opened late, resulting in a stampede that left 2 dead and 10 injured.

UNE Candidate Shot  
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3. Dr. Rolando Morales, a Congressional candidate for the center-left UNE party, underwent surgery and is in stable condition after being shot twice by three armed men outside his home in a crime-infested neighborhood of Guatemala City, early in the morning on election day. Initial reports indicated that the motive of the assault may have been robbery (the view of a top UNE official), but Morales' wife has told the media that she believes the motive was political as her husband was carrying nothing of value. The incident is under investigation.

Campaign Violence Bred Unrealized Fears of Election Day  
Violence  
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4. Press reports claiming 29 people had been killed in pre-election violence and fears that the FRG would stage violent protests in the event they lost (like they did on July 24-25) fueled concerns that the potential for violence on election day was high. MINUGUA and the OAS investigated reports of pre-electoral violence and concluded that most of the murders were not related to the elections. MINUGUA believes that five of the murders could have been related to the election campaign, and the OAS cited two. The Washington Office on Latin America issued a report on the election saying that most of the murders had been the result of common crime, a judgement we agree with. Even in those cases where politics clearly was a factor, the circumstances were local and personal. For example, an FRG supporter shot and killed a young opposition activist who was defacing FRG political posters.

Reports of Post-electoral Violence  
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5. Protests against the results of local elections continue as results are still being counted. No one party or civic association has a monopoly on the often violent protests at the municipal level so far. In Playa Grande, Quiche, crowds refused to accept the URNG's victory in the Mayor's race and continue to stage public protests. In Tamahu, Alta Verapaz, a mob burned down the house of the re-elected FRG mayor and

clashed with police, resulting in 4 persons injured. Siquinala and Masagua, both in Esquintla Department, report non-violent demonstrations by GANA and Unionista supporters against the outcomes in mayor's races there. In La Gomera (also in Esquintla Department) GANA supporters reportedly burned down the voting precinct when their mayoral candidate lost.

16. Comment: Generalized fears that the tense confrontation that characterized the 2003 elections would result in an escalation of electoral violence proved unfounded. Election day was relatively calm and acts of violence affecting voting tables on election day or after the votes were counted were less than in 1999. The large presence of international observers (over 300 on election day) and their presence in communities where violence was expected doubtless contributed to reducing mob actions against voting tables.  
HAMILTON